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Author: Jacek Wódz, Kazimiera Wódz

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Transborder Regions in Central Europe as a Political and Social Problem The Example of Upper Silesia in Poland

Jacek Wódz, Kazimiera Wódz

University of Silesia
Katowice

Transborder Regions — the Yalta Logic

Central Europe or, more exactly, Central and Eastern Europe as we perceive it today, in the year 1997, on the political map of the continent, is the outcome of numerous political processes, the consequences of which are experienced by the nations inhabiting that part of the continent, albeit those nations hardly ever have been asked their opinion regarding their belonging to one state or another, since the beginning of the 20th century. As has been emphasized oftentimes, when analysing the identity processes in Central and Eastern Europe, the 20th century is the century of determining borders in that part of Europe as a result of implementing the great European or global politics, with no respect whatsoever for the sense of national attachment of the nations inhabiting the region (Wódz J., 1994). Hence the grave problem of national minorities that is observed there, the problem of regions divided by state borders, hence also the vision of State-Nations (Etat-Nation) implemented forcefully by the creators of the post-Versailles Europe, meant to correspond with the political experiences of Western Europe, which were never shared by Eastern Europe. That Eastern Europe (and especially its easternmost part) had never had a chance to develop its identity, throughout the 19th century (Hobsbawm, 1989), having been controlled by the three empires: Germany, Russia, and Austro-Hungary. The feeble post-Versailles states had neither time nor possibility, throughout the twenty years between the end of World War I and the beginning of

World War II, to develop structures of state that would have regard for national or regional differences. Thus, the whole interwar period was abound with conflicts related to minority problems, to divided regions, to small regional and local groups which felt dominated by a majority in a given state.

The logic of Yalta appears somewhat different. There the issue was the division into influence zones between the three great powers. Still, again no question was asked regarding the borders of nations inhabiting that part of the continent, moreover, large-scale migrations became compulsory, resulting in enormous human tragedies and affecting normal relations between states up to this day. The zone given by the three great powers under Soviet control additionally underwent the processes of "Stalinisation", enhancing total absence of any identity debates. Apparently efficiently organized "socialist states" in the zone of Soviet influences, were in fact extremely centralised, thus naturally no regional debate could take place there. The consequences of that "tying up identity or regional debate" could have been observed as early as in the 1970s in Poland, mainly in Upper Silesia (Wódz J., Wódz K., 1993). Using the example of that very region we would like to indicate what further consequences that had for trans-border regions in Central and Eastern Europe.

To begin with, we still need to differentiate between three types of regions which in Central and Eastern Europe constitute a grave social and political problem. The appearance of those three types of regions, in connection with the "regional issue" (that is social and political problems related to regional identity revindications) constitutes a distinctive feature of contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, here are those three types of regions where the "regional issue" appears. They are:

a. border regions (sometimes referred to as borderland ones), namely regions whose territory and population are within one state, but where the regional border is also a state border. In order to define the sense of belonging to such a region, an essential element is the treatment of the state border as one that separates the territory belonging to "others", not only in the sense of character-differing regionally, but also nationally and state-wise. Usually such regions develop some specific (or even pathologic at times) forms of patriotism.

b. transborder regions. They result in an obvious manner from the logic applied in Yalta and Versailles. They are quite common in Central and Eastern Europe. These are historic regions in the sociological sense (unity of territory, also considering its symbolic sense, shared history, culture, social institutions, lifestyle, etc.) divided by state borders (Wódz J., Wódz K., 1995). Most often the borders divide them into two parts, which means that one part of the region belongs to one state, while the other to another state, yet there are also

cases of such historic regions belonging to three states. The basic social problem faced by such transborder regions is that of the relation between the population of a given region and the population of the rest of the country (thus always at least two countries are involved), while the crucial political problem is that of defining the population of such region in the categories of minority (national, cultural, linguistic, etc.). Examples of complications which in the interwar period bothered the international relations in Europe, and which were due exactly to the relations between majority and minorities, so indirectly also from the fact that transborder regions existed (not all minorities need to be connected with transborder regions, whereas all transborder regions are invariably the incipience of political problems related to the existence of minorities), such examples are evident enough, so no further evidence for the existence of the problem needs to be indicated.

c. regions of transborder character. They are also specific for Central and Eastern Europe. They have appeared after 1945 and embrace those regions which in the times before World War II constituted transborder regions. The resolutions made in Yalta, concerning moving of borders and huge migrations of people, resulted in such regions (transborder before) being situated within the territory of one state (not always finding themselves situated near borders, though, as the border shifts were so great that sometimes the former transborder regions have found themselves far from state borders), yet retaining traces of their former transborder character. Those traces consist mainly of the remains of those spheres of social life which have depended on the activities of public institutions (e.g. the system of education, social care, the functioning of public administration in general, labour law, organization of work, etc.).

Regions of transborder character can be found all over Europe, yet their peculiar character in Central and Eastern Europe is due to the social and political practice of the years 1945—1989/1990. That fact that throughout that time, which was the totalitarian period for that part of the continent, any debates on regional attachment had been tied up (as the centralist vision of state and the theory of national and ethnic homogeneity within state was obligatory, at least in Poland such was the official doctrine, since early 1970s), resulted in the fact that the differences between former divisions between states within regions, instead of disappearing or merely losing importance in the course of social practice within the borders of one state, underwent the tying up process. We shall see subsequently, what consequences that brought about after the overthrowing of totalitarianism after 1989/1990.

The Renaissance of Regional Identity in Poland and in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989

The downfall of the totalitarian era, although taking different course in different states, invariably had similar consequences for the issue that is of interest for us. Namely, the overthrowing of censorship and establishment of democratic principles to govern public life led to a serious debate on identity and, what followed, to the formulation of political and social regional revindications (Wódz K., 1994). Specific examples of the above are the identity debates in Upper Silesia, which region has been the subject of our empirical research (Wódz K., ed., 1995).

However, before proceeding to discuss the phenomenon of the renaissance of regional identity in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, a phenomenon of more general nature is worth pointing out. This is emphasized in order to avoid a quite common yet totally false proposition that the form of regional revindications in Central Europe after 1989 is something utterly specific or even, as some claim, is a simple consequence of leaving totalitarianism behind. Such a general statement can find neither proof nor justification. To substantiate the above, two reasonably widespread works of Michel Maffesoli, a French sociologist, will be mentioned (Maffesoli, 1992; Maffesoli, 1993). Maffesoli, when analyzing societies of Western Europe, announced the end of the social individualism epoch, which has been replaced by communitarism or even tribalism (the latter being an expression used by Michel Maffesoli himself). Generally speaking, the phenomenon in question consists of the domination of revindications of communities or homogeneous social groups (including territorial ones, such as regions) over preserving civil rights of individuals. That tribalism, as Maffesoli labels that phenomenon, on the one hand is a social power possessed by such communities ("we are stronger when we come out as members of homogeneous social groups", this often grants mental power to feeble individuals who would not be able to formulate their revindications themselves), on the other hand it provides ways of organizing those communities, as it proves easy to gain charismatic leadership over them. Phenomena of such a kind can indeed be observed in principally all historic regions of Central and Eastern Europe, while the peculiar situation of that part of the continent lies in the fact that civil society is absent there, that no democratic attitudes can be noticed, that institutions whose aim is to defend civil rights are inefficient, briefly speaking those societies abide in the proto-democratic period. Hence, the regional identity renaissance in Central Europe after 1989 has been highly charged with communitarism, and has shown clearly not enough respect for civil rights of

individual citizens. Anyway, that point can be relatively easily carried by indicating three elements of the regional identity renaissance present in that part of the continent:

a. the exclusive character of the notion of identity (division into “our folk”, deriving from the region, and “others” or “strangers”, thus actually making reference to the ethnic understanding of region);

b. the type of regional leadership, usually based upon “regional ideology” by which notion one should understand the building of the picture of the region in bright colours only, while accusing the majority in a given state of bad intentions towards that region (which invariably constitutes a minority);

c. relying merely on selected excerpts from the past, coupled with a lack of prospective vision for the region. In social and political practice that entailed continual reference to the wrong experienced in the past by the population of the region (which population was often defined as a minority harmed by majority), as well as absence of thinking about the future perceived as common future shared in the own country, in the specific part of the continent, also in Europe as a whole. Indeed, this constitutes a limitation of perspectives for the social development of the region. One may ask here why that vision of region, autodestructive as it in fact is, has been so frequently approved in the course of processes of regional identity revival in countries of Central Europe after 1989. There is basically one answer to such a question, a political answer, not a sociological one: it happens so because such a traditional vision of the region, vision based upon analysing the wrong suffered in the past, serves well the type of charismatic leadership prevailing there, or based upon the traditional role of institutions of regional character (e.g. the role of the Church in Upper Silesia).

What has been mentioned above shall explain the numerous difficulties met when implementing, in that part of the continent, the idea of cooperation between regions in Europe, as such cooperation assumes a prospective definition of a region, as well as respecting civil rights of individuals (which is in conflict with the community-oriented, ethnic vision proclaimed by traditionally-minded leaders).

When discussing the renaissance of regional identity in Central Europe, one cannot forget a major factor, namely that of economy. After 1989, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe underwent a transformation from planned economy, dominating for a few dozens of years, to free market economy. For many historic regions, such a transformation implied changes of their economic functions and their economic importance for the country. Usually those changes have been adverse for their position (although one may find exceptional examples when the position changed favourably, e.g. in case of some regions situated near borders, where foreign trade allowed to generate

additional and sometimes substantial income). Thus, the reviving regional identity has gained additional components, economic ones (besides historic, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc., present before). Today one can venture an opinion that economic content constitutes an important part in the set of regional revindications in Central and Eastern Europe.

Cultural Specificity of Transborder Regions in Poland

When analyzing that issue, one should start from a short reminder of the changes that Polish borders underwent in the 20th century, as without it it would be utterly pointless to describe transborder regions of Poland. Let us begin by stating that Poland, which had been absent from the political map of Europe throughout the 19th century, worked out having been partitioned between the occupants (Germany, Russia, Austro-Hungary) a specific model of national identity. A romantic and extremely centralised model it was. A few words of explanation seem necessary to explain the above notions. Thus, the romanticism of the Polish identity resulting from the fact that the country lacked its own state (namely its territory and institutions), in short consisted of the fact that the whole population has been supposed to accept (such was the assumption) a certain set of common national symbols, the role of which has been of much higher order than that of everyday reality. In turn, the centralised character of that model consists of indicating the most crucial symbolic focal points for the whole nation (hence the extreme symbolic role of the capital, Warsaw, or the equally crucial role of the sanctuary in Częstochowa where the Virgin Mary is worshipped), ignoring at the same time the importance of regional symbols or focal points for local population. In such a situation, after 1918 the Poland that emerged as a result of the Versailles Treaty had been a country contained within its inter-war borders, which contained many transborder regions, holding at the same time to the romantic and centralised model of regional identity, which clearly had not invited solving regional questions. The most important transborder region, causing also greatest problems for the inter-war Poland, was that of Upper Silesia, situated within the borders of Poland, Germany, and partly also those of Czechoslovakia. The eastern Polish border at that time marked a few transborder regions of which basically one (on the border between Poland and Lithuania) caused serious social and political problems. Other eastern transborder regions (Polesie, Wołyń, Bukowina, etc.) brought about no considerable problems, mainly because of the fact that the local populations

then there could not boast any well developed national identity, defining themselves oftentimes solely through their local attachment.

After 1945, when Polish borders were shifted substantially indeed, the situation was much different. Following the decisions taken in Yalta, the eastern territories of Poland, belonging to that country before 1939, were given to the Soviet Union, while Poland took over a considerable part of the former Eastern Prussia, the whole of Upper Silesia, a substantial part of Lower Silesia, as well as of Pomerania. That crucial shift of borders (at some places the shift comprised moving the borders over 500 km in the East—West direction) resulted in forcing huge migrations of people which, in the humanitarian dimension, were overwhelming tragedies for the people forced to migrate. The planned movements of population of big towns resulted, for example, in having a considerable percentage of the population of Lvov moved to the town of Wrocław. The recourse to the symbolism of former regions ceased to exist while, as generation passed, symbolism relating to new regions got established. The Poles who were born in Wrocław or Szczecin felt even more related to their respective regions, being at the same time unaware (due to living within a totalitarian state) of the fact that Germans were expelled from those regions.

Basically, there had been no serious debate in Poland, regarding transborder regions, prior to 1989/1990. Soon after 1989, however, when the freedom to express thoughts was restored, the phenomenon of regional identity renaissance, described before, got established, transborder regions got rediscovered. The paradox to which we shall devote the forthcoming part of the paper, consists of the fact that Upper Silesia, the major Polish transborder region from before 1939, found itself belonging almost entirely to Poland, and gained, in the classification employed by us, the status not of a transborder region, but of a region of transborder character. At the same time, real (and to some degree fresh) transborder regions of Poland appeared within its present borders. They are all situated along either the eastern border or the eastern part of the southern border of Poland. On one hand, this is a result of the border shift (decided in Yalta), on the other hand they originated in the mass forced migrations dating back to the end of World War II. Today's transborder regions of Poland (with two exceptions, namely the Poprad river region, inhabited by Slovak population, and the region around the town of Sejny, where the population cultivates Lithuanian cultural traditions) are in a sense the result of enhanced regional and national identity of the population from the Byelorussia and Ukraine borderland. As recently as 50 years ago, those people referred to themselves using the terms of local identity, while at present they gained national identity, and the regions inhabited by those people (e.g. the region of Ukrainian borderland near the town of Przemyśl) have gained the status of transborder regions, as for today.

What constitutes the cultural specificity of those new transborder regions of Poland? Mainly that dynamism characterising the formation of regional identity, the latter being at the stage of definition completion, of coming true in the relationships with majorities (on both sides of the border). Thus, those regions may provide instances of aggressive and extreme revindications, which constitute a peculiar test of how far one can go in revindications addressed to the two states located on the two sides of the border.

The appearance of those new transborder regions also has some grave consequences for the policy of Poland, and for that canon of Polish national identity which is rooted in romanticism. In Poland, as well as in other “new democracies” of Central and Eastern Europe, there appear some political opinions, along with small political parties of exclusive, traditional, and national character (in Poland among such parties one can list ZChN — Christian-National Union, or KPN — Confederation for an Independent Poland). For parties of such a kind the fact that national identity develops in transborder regions is a proof that Polish national tradition gets neglected, and that Polish reasons of State are under threat. All parties of such a kind are anti-European in general (in the sense that they are against joining the European Union by Poland), for them the word “European” has a clearly pejorative meaning. The development of regional identity in transborder regions, questioning the old, traditional sense of state borders, is subject to attacks directed mainly at regional leaders and regional organizations. The result of such attacks is that the fresh identity of transborder regions develops in a conflict-prone situations, being highly politicised (that is the specific reaction to attacks by nationalist parties), often pushing true reflections upon culture into background. On the other hand, that very context of renaissance or simply emergence of regional identity in transborder regions results in the fact that those regions are involved in the national debate upon Polish national identity and future relations between Poland and other members of the European Union.

The Example of Upper Silesia

It has already been mentioned earlier and repeatedly that the region that we particularly focus upon is the region of Upper Silesia. That is a traditional industrial region, which in the interwar period used to be a classical example of a transborder region, while nowadays when the Polish state borders had been shifted, has become a region of transborder character. That region, a very important region of mining and traditional heavy industry (metallurgy,

metal industries, etc.) was historically linked with Austria and Germany, while the Versailles Treaty resulted in making it a transborder region (Wanatowicz, 1994). Since 1945 that region has belonged almost entirely to Poland (except for some small parts located in the Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak borderlands), yet it preserved both its specific culture and some traces of divisions dating back to the times when it used to be a transborder region. It is in that sense that it can be treated as a region of transborder character. To that extent, an enormous role was played by World War II, and the policy of Nazi Germany (so-called *Volkslisten*). Later, in 1970s, that was followed by considerable waves of emigration from that region to Germany. As a result, today's situation is such that in the territories which in the interwar period had a significant German minority, nowadays there is a large percentage of Upper Silesian families with relatives living in the Federal Republic of Germany. That fact ensures that we deal with a region of transborder character, as such a phenomenon is absent from that part of the region (due to the lack of any strict definition of the region, we are forced to use statistics applying to the Katowice Province) which either had not belonged to Germany prior to 1939, or had no German minority.

Before proceeding to discuss some findings of our empirical research, we need to stress the importance of the collapse of traditional industries for the regional consciousness (Wódz K., ed., 1994). Namely, the regional consciousness comprises numerous connections, both purely social ones (e.g. the type of education received, type of profession, traditional family structure), and symbolic ones, with the traditional dominating professions of miner, metallurgist, or metal industry worker. Today, the renaissance of regional identity collides in the region with the awareness of collapse of traditional heavy industries and mining. One may not forget that when analysing that specific case of a region of transborder character.

There is no room here to analyse the history of regional consciousness of Silesians. Let us merely mention that history (particularly starting from mid 18th century, that is from the time when industrialization of the region started) taught them a specific pragmatism, oftentimes they prefer to define themselves by stating their belonging to the region, than by stating their nationality (Polish, German or, in the very south of the region, Czech). Research conducted in the early 1990s in the Katowice Province by a team headed by Kazimiera Wódz (Wódz K. ed., 1995, a) indicated that among the inhabitants of that province (comprising today most of the historic region of Upper Silesia) three national identifications: Polish, German, and Silesian, were indicated as attachment. Those who identified themselves as Silesians go beyond the local or regional associations to much lesser degree than those who identified themselves as Poles or Germans (although the latter were definitely the smallest in numbers). Thus Silesians are definitely most often

related solely to local or regional perspective. It should be remembered, however, discussions upon regional identity were locked up in the years 1945—1989, and everybody was simply considered a Pole. It was only after 1989 the process of revival of regional belonging started, being linked with a widespread debate upon various regional revindications (together with projects of peculiar regional autonomy within the Polish state). There have been two faces of that debate: political and socio-cultural one. We are particularly interested in the latter, yet the former should not be totally neglected either. Thus we shall begin with a very concise reminder of the crucial political elements of that debate. The political character of both the identity debate and some regional revindications in Upper Silesia may be reduced to three facts:

a. in Upper Silesia the outdated character of the Polish romantic and centralistic model of national identity is stressed for that region, due to which regional revindications are treated there, from a purely political point of view, as struggle against that canon of national identity of Poles that reaches for romanticism and centralism;

b. local elites do not find ground to fulfill their political ambitions at the national level, thus a specific political ghetto gets formed at the regional level, which causes models of political careers to rely more on demonstrating the belonging to the region than is the case in other parts of the country;

c. the regional political life focuses (apart from two regional branches of nationwide political parties) upon two specific proto-parties of regional character. Those proto-parties (Movement for Silesian Autonomy, Upper Silesian Association) are organizations acting as regional associations on everyday basis, yet during election campaigns they put forward candidates and formulate political programmes (invariably confined to the region), active during election campaigns. After elections are over, they settle back to the rhythm of activity that is typical for social associations.

All the above three elements result in Upper Silesia having a separate political quality in comparison with the rest of the country. Our chief interest lies, however, in the socio-cultural shape of regional revindications in Upper Silesia. In the process of revival of regional identity, the specific social space of the region was very clearly referred to (Wódz J., ed., 1990). The region is highly urbanized, with towns in which social space has been organized in a specific way. Besides traditional town and city centres, those towns comprise old working class settlements (so-called *familoki*, family houses, somewhat similar in their organization to the so-called *corons* in North-Eastern France) inhabited by people employed in one specific enterprise (usually a mine or steelworks). That method of space organization enabled the survival in those settlements of Silesian population of Polish origin, speaking the peculiar Polish dialect referred to there as "Silesian speech". Town and city centres, usually

being the residence of administration (first German, to be followed by Polish one, yet clerks were not of Upper Silesian origin, thus spoke literary Polish, clearly distinct from the Silesian dialect) have been (and are often still being) treated as "foreign" space, as "home" space was exclusively that inside the worker settlement. Such a method of organization of space resulted in long-lasting worker tradition, which today is the basis for the cultural identity of the region, whose elites excluded themselves from those groups, by abandoning the dialect and taking to literary German or Polish. That dialect, clearly originating from old Polish, contains numerous words of German origin, oftentimes deformed. Words of German origin are particularly numerous in Silesian dialect in the sphere related to work or official contact with authorities and administration. The Polish dialect also testified to the once transborder character of the region. As for today, such a cultural fact indicates the lack of cultural elites in the region, as well as identity oriented chiefly towards the past. One can even indicate a certain fear linked with looking towards the future. All those issues create numerous difficulties for modernizing cultural life in the region, and add to complicating the dialogue with the majority constituting the rest of the country.

Another element of culture is the emphasizing the importance of origin from a family deeply rooted in Silesia, that is relying on understanding regional culture in purely ethnic terms. This results in a sharp distinction between "our folks" and "strangers" (Wódz K., ed., 1993). Naturally, there are numerous nuances applied to this division in everyday life yet, for example, it is not without importance in choosing one's spouse, "trans-regional" marriages being still not so frequent, which justifies the opinion that certain cultural elements of the division into "our folks" and "strangers" shall persist in the generation to come.

Yet another element of culture is also worth pointing out, namely the relative character of cultural relations with both Polish culture, and (although to a much lesser degree) with German culture. Research of purely qualitative character (Rakocz, Wódz, 1996) indicates that the basis for cultural identification is still provided by regional identification, in reference to Polish culture as the dominating culture in the state, but also with reference (particularly among elderly inhabitants of the region) to certain elements of German culture (related in particular to organization of work and public life). The research quoted above, carried out under the supervision of Kazimiera Wódz, indicates that even those Silesians who clearly associate themselves with Polish identity (labelling themselves as Silesians-Poles) feel but a little distance towards German culture (Wódz K., ed., 1995, a). Depending on the context of situation, close relations with either Polish culture or elements of German culture are stressed. Speaking their own dialect (a dialect clearly based upon Polish language) Silesians as a rule speak bad German,

or do not speak it at all. They learn literary Polish at schools, while in contacts with family members who live in the Federal Republic of Germany they use their own dialect, exclusively. The feature of situational relativity of their identity and language towards Polish culture, as well as partly towards German culture, may be their specific capital in relations with other regions (which local elites understand), but may also be a reason why they are reluctant towards contacts with other regions and why they enter a specific cultural ghetto.

New Perspectives

All the transborder regions of Poland are familiar with the strategy of developing regions through their cooperation in Europe (Charpentier, Engel, eds., 1992). For local elites it constitutes a specific model to be applied in their own strategies for regional development. It should be stressed, however, that that type of logic undergoes most advanced development and enjoys most down-to-earth applications in Polish-German and German-Czech borderlands (Lepesant, 1996). A good example of such development can be seen in agreement, signed in December 1996, between Polish and Czech communes/municipalities on the formation of an Euro-region in the area of Kłodzko, bearing a Latin name of "Euroregio Glacensis" (*Rzeczpospolita*, 1996). Is it, then, possible to employ for the development of regional development the model known as "Euroregions" for all transborder regions of Poland? The issue appears highly complicated, as we deal with three different situations:

a. the Polish-German border is in fact a border between European Union and Poland, a country associated with the Union. The "Euroregion" solutions may thus be applied as defined by European Union, financial and organizational support of the Union may also be considered;

b. it is possible to adapt the "Euroregion" logic along the Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak borders, as all the three states, being associated with European Community, have indirectly acknowledged the logic of regional development applied by the Union. Moreover, the Union itself proposes a few aid and support programmes to be used when developing cooperation in transborder regions located along the Polish-Czech border (cf. the "Euroregio Glacensis" example), or along the Polish-Slovak border;

c. the situation along the Polish eastern border is somewhat different. The relations between Poland and its eastern or north-eastern neighbours

are of more complicated character, also the cooperation within the transborder regions being established there proves not so easy. Anyway, the attempts to adjust the "Euroregion" model to that cooperation should be noted, although experiences in this respect appear not to be of the best kind. For a few years now work has been going on to implement the idea of the Karpaty (Carpathians) Euroregion (Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania to be involved), yet a few serious obstacles have been encountered (e.g. absence of traditions to cooperate, political treatment of the project within each of the prospective partners, lack of legal basis for independence to be granted to communes/municipalities as regards international contacts, etc.). On the other hand, however, emphasis needs to be put to the considerable increase in trade over the Polish borders with eastern neighbours, which trade slowly but surely makes cooperation between communes/municipalities situated along the border a necessity as, in a political sense of the word, a true lobby may arise.

A separate form of cooperation consists of the initiatives undertaken by associations of communes/municipalities in transborder regions, or regions of transborder character (Wódz J., 1996). The Association of Communes from Upper Silesia and Northern Moravia, a grassroots organization established by the communes/municipalities themselves, comprising both Polish and Czech communes, may serve as an example here. That organization, without any public title (being an association of communes) is in fact a lobby pestering local administrations to consider transborder cooperation in their plans for development.

The considerable amount of initiatives, coinciding with the revival of awareness among transborder regions, allow to believe that the social function of state borders may change, at least in the awareness of Poles (but also Czechs, Germans, Slovaks, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and Russians). It is still a border that divides and separates, not a border which but delineates the area where certain laws are in force, separating neither cultures nor people (as is the case in those regions of Western Europe that are of transborder character).

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